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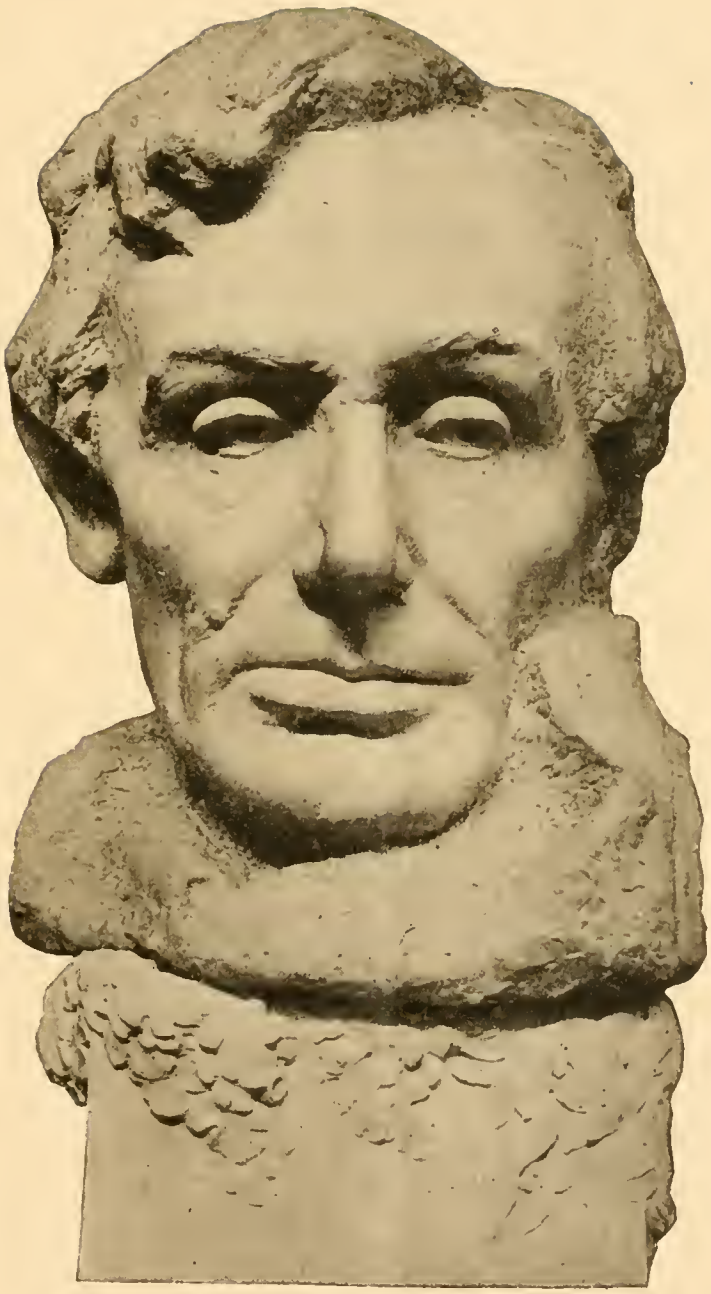
The United States Intelligencer

Soul Growth of Abraham Lincoln

By JOHN McELROY



Gutzon Borglum's Study of Abraham Lincoln.

The United States Intelligencer

Soul Growth of Abraham Lincoln

BY

JOHN McELROY

WASHINGTON, D. C.
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PORTRAITS OF LINCOLN

It is always impossible to get a real portrait of any great man. An artist inevitably imbues his work with his own individuality, and he will not fail to emphasize that in his subject which appeals directly to him. Not one of the many portraits and even photographs of Lincoln satisfies those who have known, studied and admired the great President. The best of all the portraits is that made by Gutzon Borglum, whose marble bust in the Rotunda of the National Capitol is the result of a long and exhaustive study of all the known portraits and photographs. Mr. Borglum found two entirely different sides to Mr. Lincoln's face, one full of his mercy and tenderness, and the other of his strength of leadership. Reproductions of this are given herewith. The other portrait, that by Mr. Marshall, is interesting, since it seems to have caught the exaltation of spirit which we associate with the great Hebrew prophets.

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Soul Growth of Abraham Lincoln

NOT since the Divine Tragedy on Calvary has mankind seen such an exaltation of the soul as in Abraham Lincoln.

Birth as lowly as that in the Manger at Bethlehem; parentage of the rude and unlettered jetsam, flung far out by the advancing wave of civilization; denied a draft from even the humblest fount of learning; early moral training vague to the vanishing point; unschooled even by the sight and speech of men of higher culture, yet dying at the early age of 56, Lincoln reached the very pinnacle of the world's material and moral greatness.

Hath the omnipotence of God shown any greater miracle?

We must see in Abraham Lincoln in the beginning a plain, ordinary American soul, differing not one particle or impulse from those of the primitive toilers around him, but this soul, receiving some Divine germ—some quickening ray from the Holy Ghost—growing and expanding, day by day, year by year, widening its reach as it rose with the steadiness of the sun over the broadening horizon of men's minds, until its fame "folded in this orb of earth."

All this time this soul remained wholly and essentially American—an absolute product of the soil on which it grew, taking no form, shape or color from Old World learning, character or thought. It was as distinctively American as the noble trees and plants which spring only from our own unworn, untainted soil, expand under our own wide-arching, strength-compelling skies, and are found nowhere else in the world.

MUST we believe that the age of miracles is past—that the Holy Spirit long since ceased to manifest itself to man?

Assertions of Divine Intervention and Special Providences should and must be always viewed with obdurate doubt. Not because such things are impossible, but from the difficulty of believing that the Creator of the Universe often intervenes to change or arrest the operation of His own immutable laws.

Yet, at wide intervals of time there come events of such momentous importance to mankind, for which the severest scrutiny can develop no other explanation, that we are constrained to turn to Divine Interposition for the reason that must exist for all things.

Protestant, Catholic, Jew, Mahometan or Free Thinker, believing in any degree that life and the universe have a moral purpose, cannot escape the conviction that Divine intervention is from time to time necessary to set the clock of moral progress.

The first fact we are to consider, and it is startling in magnitude, is that we know inconceivably more of every part of Lincoln's life than of any other man's who ever lived. The Egyptian flies were scarcely more numerous than the political enemies swarming about him; certainly they were not more virulent and inevasible. On the other hand, Lincoln's political friends of that day and the eager historical students for nearly a half century since have left no day or act of his life unscanned, no friend or acquaintance unquestioned. Fiercer white light than ever beat on any throne makes every day that Lincoln lived as familiar to us as our own yesterdays. It is impossible that the career of any other man should bear this scrutiny as Lincoln's has. So absolutely blameless a life as he led was a miracle in itself.

Let theologians wrangle as they will over the dogmas as to the Holy Ghost. Plain people of all faiths will persist in understanding Him as the agency by which the Deity

makes His purposes effective. The Holy Spirit made an obscure maiden of Galilee the Mother of Jesus. Did not the same medium make the equally obscure Illinois boy the greatest moral power since the Man of Sorrows?

This is not so much a presumption as a legitimate conclusion from all known facts.

MANY see the Holy Spirit in everything that makes the world good and gladsome, from the singing of birds and fragrance of flowers to the life-giving sunshine.

Others would confine this to that which lifts Man above the brutes that perish, and to a little lower than the angels.

Still others would restrict it to a Pentecostal gift to some particular man like Moses, John the Baptist, St. Paul and Luther, to raise him far above his fellows, make him their moral guide, and lead them to newer and higher planes of spirituality.

Theologians have always held that the Holy Ghost was present with, guided and controlled the great solemn councils of the Church. Some one man has always been at the forefront, standing out far before the others, in every great forward moral stride that the world has made.

Abraham Lincoln stood thus at the front, when the world made the greatest spiritual advance since the day when Christ lifted mankind out of the cramped and purblind materialism of Paganism and Judaism and revealed the exalted verities of Eternal Life.

WE AMERICANS fall short in only thinking of Lincoln as the Emancipator, the Nation Saver, the wisest of statesmen. We are slow to comprehend his inestimable value to the whole world, and that he opened a great moral era like those of Moses and St. Paul.

Since history began Power has been always intimately—inevitably—allied with haughtiness, harshness and dire cruelty; Authority with arbitrary selfishness; War with spoliation and vengeance.

No Asiatic despot or military chief ever held in his hand the absolute power wielded by Abraham Lincoln. Yet no man was more humble before the Lord and the meanest of his people. Authority in Abraham Lincoln's hands was determined justice ever swerving toward mercy. In the greatest, fiercest war in history not a blow was struck, not a victim sacrificed after resistance ceased. Every hour of Lincoln's life saw some deed of mercy, some act of forgiveness, not one of hate or vindictiveness.

The cruelties and wrongs which have deformed all Governments lost their excuse before this exhibition of overwhelming strength and relentless purpose acting in absolute righteousness. Every Government in the world has become much the better for it. Every man in authority has found himself compared with Lincoln's exalted use of power, and forced in some degree to emulate his example.

Scarce one so lowly and oppressed in any land as not to receive an uplifting ray from the shining avatar in the West.

All Governments became purer in their aims, higher in their ideals, more just in their practices, because of the example he set.

CHRIST was born in the hoary and storied East, a land filled with the decaying temples and dying faiths of thousands of years. He came to a people whose racial history was a succession of subjugations, captivities and enslavements. Their overworked, jaded soil gave but grudging support to the multiplying population. Superimposed above the Jews were the strata of all their former masters, Hittite, Egyptian, Persian and Greek, with the heavy-handed Roman above them all. All was dejection

and hopelessness, with the people in the sordid debasement of the effort to merely live. Christ brought to them the Evangel that the soul was far greater than the body, and that the highest freedom was obtained by emancipating it to righteousness. Christ grew up to His great mission by living with and sharing the life of the lowliest, bearing their burdens, performing their duties, feeling their sorrows.

Contrast this with one of the greatest of His followers.

Abraham Lincoln grew up on virgin soil, fresh and unpolluted from the hands of its Maker, among a free, strong, virile people. They had never known a master but God and their own wills. They were rude as the foes they conquered, primitive as the wilds they subdued, poor to nothingness in worldly goods, but rich in hope, courage and will. Their minds were as wide-reaching as their prairies, bounded only by the high-arching heavens.

Sharing to the uttermost their toils, privations and hardships, learning their language, speaking their speech, even thinking their thoughts, Lincoln became their leader in the smaller things, then in the greater ones, his soul broadening with every "process of the sun" until he reached the pinnacle of human greatness.

Lincoln's supreme work lasted precisely as long as Christ's—four years.

THERE had come the fulness of time for an advent of the Holy Ghost.

The hundreds of years of religious wars which had scourged the world had ended in an armistice. Roman Catholic, Protestant and Mahometan held what they had gained, and sheathed their swords. The battleflags of the creeds had been folded away. Men had forgotten them in rallying around the broader war-banners of human rights and just government. The discredited Captains and the Kings of Absolutism were departing. Puny principalities

ceased their little wars of jealousy, and people of kindred blood coalesced into great Nations.

At last, in the divine program had come the day when Governments were to be for man and not man for the Governments—when the supreme function and object of all Government was to secure the most absolute justice, liberty and love for every man and woman, as the will of

"That God which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole Creation moves."

And the Spirit of God moved, not on the face of the waters as in the creation of a world, but on the hearts of men in the creation of a moral firmament.

God has always called His chosen agents out of an obscurity like that darkness from which He created the world.

A foundling gave laws, religion and racial life to the Jews, and higher morals to all mankind. The forerunner of Jesus dwelt in the desert, far from men, until he appeared among them clad in a coarse garment of camel's hair. Unknown in all the circles of Jerusalem was the humble maiden residing remotely in despised Galilee, who was selected for motherhood of the Redeemer. The cloisters of rude, almost semi-barbarous, Germany contained, among their crowd of meek-eyed scriveners, no more obscure monk than Martin Luther. The birth and rearing of Abraham Lincoln was as lowly as any of these. The work he did in bringing nearer the coming of the Kingdom was second only to that of the greatest of the religious leaders.

THE way that humbly planted soul grew under the quickening of the Holy Ghost was like unto the mustard seed in the parable. To-day merely a leader of his rude fellows in athletic sports, to-morrow one of their law-givers. In a few swiftly growing years he was the head of the mightiest armies that ever shook the earth

with their tread, and which covered the extent of an empire with their awful battlefields.

Under the quickening and guidance of the Holy Spirit he called a whole Nation to instant arms for the Right. At the bidding of a man whose heart was so gentle and merciful that he stopped and lifted the stricken fledgelings back into their nests, five hundred thousand men died for their country and another half million fell before them. This man

"So slow to strike, so swift to spare,"

saw without faltering of purpose "a thousand fall at his side and ten thousand on his right hand."

What but the actual presence of the Holy Ghost could have made this man wiser than all the "learned statesmen who at his council met?" Greater in war than any of the Generals who commanded his hosts?

The English-speaking race has occupied the center of the world's stage for a thousand years. During that time it has crowded every branch of effort and achievement with the greatest men the age has produced.

Yet the greatest of all men who have spoken English is admittedly Abraham Lincoln.

AS THE end of his mission approached, his soul, freeing itself from the physical and material facts of the great and engrossing conflict, assumed more and more the sublimity of the old Hebrew prophets.

At his second inaugural—only six weeks before his death—when he was so near Eternity that his far-seeing vision might have beheld the Gates of the Beyond opening for him, he spoke as none but Isaiah might have spoken:

"Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the Nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

"The prayer of both could not be answered—those of neither have been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.'

"If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?

"Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may soon pass away.

"Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

"*With malice toward none, with charity for all*, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the Nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and for his orphan; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all Nations."

His heart went out in unfailing sympathy and love to everything that breathed. He not only noted the sparrow's fall, but hastened to help the sparrow to wing again. Responding like a sensitive harp to the lofty self-sacrifice of every boy fighting, enduring and dying for the Nation, sorrowing for every bereaved mother of a fallen son, he yet brooded over his erring countrymen as Christ did over stiff-necked, rebellious Jerusalem.

FROM Lincoln's lips fell the nearest approach of any human utterances to the Sermon on the Mount. Let us garner a few:

"At what point, then, is the approach of danger to be expected? Answer: If it ever reaches us, it must spring up among us.

"It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of free men, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.

"This nation cannot live on injustice. 'A house divided against itself cannot stand,' I say again and again.

"Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and under a just God cannot long retain it.

"Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty, as we understand it.

"In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war.

"The Government will not assail you; you can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors.

"You can have no oath, registered in heaven to destroy the Government; while I shall have the most solemn one to 'preserve, protect, and defend' it.

"I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break, our bonds of affection.

"The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

"And having thus chosen our course, without guile and with pure purpose, let us renew our trust in God, and go forward without fear and with manly hearts.

"We say that we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We—even we here—hold the power and bear the responsibility.

"In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve.

"We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not, cannot, fail.

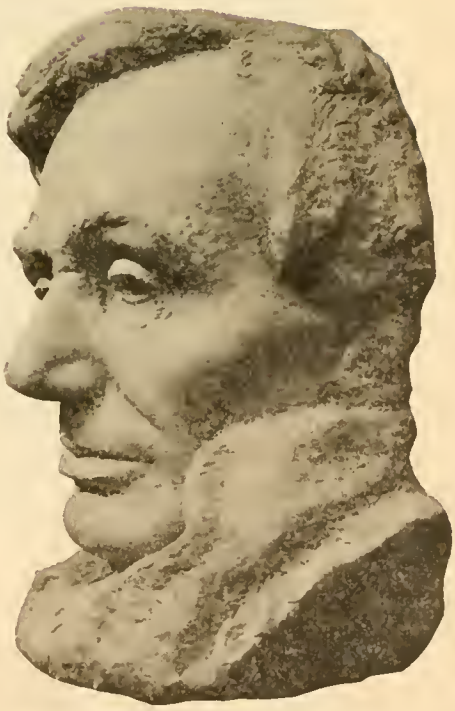
"The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just—a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless.

"Whatever shall be sincerely and in God's name devised for the good of the soldiers and seamen in their hard spheres of duty, can scarcely fail to be blessed.

"How willingly would I exchange places today with the soldier who sleeps on the ground in the Army of the Potomac!

"I have higher faith than yours. I have faith, not only that God is with our cause, but that He will control the hearts of the people so that they will be faithful to it, too."

Gutzon Borglum's Study of the Right Side of Lincoln's Face, Showing His Strength.



Gutzon Borglum's Study of the Left Side of Lincoln's Face, Showing His Sympathy and Mercy.

THE MARSHALL PORTRAIT.
Recalling the Faces of the Old Hebrew Prophets.

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